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County, state officials recognize Bioenergy Day

'Bioenergy is the future.'

By Franklin Clark

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Two local locations that harness the power of bioenergy were toured and recognized on Wednesday by local and state officials.



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Cox Interior CEO Barry Cox was one of many who spoke at Bioenergy Day on Wednesday.

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Wednesday, Oct. 21, was the third annual National Bioenergy Day, said Tim Hughes, director of the Division of Biofuels at the Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet.

According to Hughes, the event was well attended, with people attending from as far away as New Jersey.

"We have over 150 respondents with intentions to attend the event," said Hughes. "The Taylor County Cooperative Extension Service staff, Cox Interiors, and Mac Farms have been great partners in this event."

Cox touted his company's ability to take a log, turn it into molding and have it in a house in the space of two weeks. The company specializes in poplar wood molding.

Cox Interior CEO Barry Cox stated that in 1983, he and his family were the first to do that; pine was typically the wood of choice, and he said it was difficult to even give poplar away, but that has changed.

Cox Interior, established in 1983, has used a biomass-fueled boiler/steam turbine, also called a CHP (combined heat and power system), to generate heat and electricity since 1994. The business started the Cox Waste-to-Energy program in 1992.

"If you can think of something that nobody else has, you're lucky," said Cox. "That is what Cox Interior is all about."

Cox stated that their project has ultimately saved them about \$75,000 a month on electricity. They also sell some electricity to East Kentucky Power Cooperative, although he said they don't make much of a profit on it.

EKPC Environmental Manager Jeff said they buy power at a rate that is allowed by the Kentucky Public Service Commission.

"You're offsetting some more expensive power," said Brandt.

Cox also said they make as much as \$4 million a year selling sawdust to farms.

John McLean, the fourth generation of McLeans to work on Mac Farms on Meadow Creek Road, has been working on his biomass generator – an anaerobic digester – for nearly four years, starting in the fall of 2011. The generator was recently fired up for the first time.

Taylor County Judge/Executive Eddie Rogers called bioenergy projects like this "a big plus for our community."

"Bioenergy is the future," said Rogers. "I can remember when Cox was first started. They fought a big battle to have energy here in Taylor County."

Both CI and Mac Farms have gotten involved in a big industry and have spent quite a bit of money in the process, and it's paying off, according to Rogers.

Boyle County Judge/Executive Harold McKinney talked about the partnership between Boyle County, Cox Interior and the University of Louisville's Pollution Prevention Center, calling it the "grand slam of partnerships – public, private and educational."

With the partnership, McKinney said, UofL gets pollution prevention, Boyle County gets rid of its wood waste and CI gets fuel for its biomass generator.

Brandt spoke more about McLean's project. "What he's doing is wonderful," Brandt said. "If there's anyone out there who wants to mimic what he's done, I'll be glad to talk to you about what East Kentucky Power can do."

McLean did not speak during the program at the Extension Office, but he was present and was recognized.

Of the 13 megawatts of power that EKPC supplied to members last year, roughly 77-85 percent of it came from coal, with 4 percent generated by gas and less than 1 percent generated by renewables, according to Brandt.

Kentucky Energy & Environment Cabinet Secretary Dr. Leonard Peters talked about finding a balance between preserving the environment and preserving jobs, stating that bioenergy helps us find that balance. Wind and solar resources in Kentucky aren't that great, he added.

According to Peters, the logging industry has all but disappeared from New York because of their regulations on the preservation of forests.

Peters argued that more emphasis on renewable energy is going to be required, whether or not people agree with the concept of climate change.

"Things are moving in that direction," said Peters.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development State Director Tom Fern mentioned a \$153,000 grant for new lighting at CI, part of \$2.9 million in grants given to groups in Kentucky in FY 15.

Forester Paul Finke of the U.S. Forest Service at Daniel Boone National Forest talked about the Wood Energy Initiative. Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy Director of Financial Services Bill McCloskey also spoke.

Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear declared this month as Energy Awareness month.

"Energy efficiency is important to Kentucky because it saves consumers money, makes businesses more competitive and helps protect the environment," the proclamation reads. "Kentucky's farms, forests and other industries are sustainably contributing significant quantities of biomass for fuel, electrical and thermal energy."

According to the proclamation, the Kentucky Association of Manufacturers and the Kentucky Pollution Prevention Center help manufacturers be more cost effective, energy efficient and competitive.

Tours of Cox Interior and Mac Farms were held before and after the program.